

"Girlfriends of the Court"

Amicae Curiae

Bettina Arndt, Booby trap, double standards, lady lawyers, provocation

'I Know What Boys Like': What Women Wear

In fashion, media, Photography, women on **February 12, 2012** at 7:06 pm



(http://amicaecuriae.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/800px-vada_bikini.jpg)

It's all in the attitude, isn't it?

What women dare wear:

An op-ed over the weekend by [Bettina Arndt](http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/the-booby-trap-20120211-1syoi.html) (<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/the-booby-trap-20120211-1syoi.html>) has re-opened the debate about what women wear – in particular her statement that: 'Everywhere you look, women are stepping out dressed provocatively, but bristling if the wrong man shows he enjoys the display.'

This appeared not long after the [national press](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/media-revved-up-over-bikie-lawyer/story-e6frg996-1226260010810) (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/media-revved-up-over-bikie-lawyer/story-e6frg996-1226260010810>) focused on the physical appearance of the lawyer for Vincenzo Focarelli, the leader of a bikie gang. Lawyer Stacey Carter was compared with 'Melbourne Underbelly (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underbelly_%28TV_series%29) lawyer [Zara Garde-Wilson](http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/gallery/gallery-e6frewxi-1111119690316?page=1) (<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/gallery/gallery-e6frewxi-1111119690316?page=1>)' and the newspaper report I read showed photos of the two (though online shows only Ms Carter). A lot in the article turned on establishing Ms Carter's credibility – apparently *despite* her attractive appearance:

(read on)

... the media chose to get a little bit excited . . . because she is a young, attractive dark-haired girl there is a comparison to Underbelly...She is a damn good young lawyer and I don't want her credibility affected. ([The Australian](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/media-revved-up-over-bikie-lawyer/story-e6frg996-1226260010810) (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/media-revved-up-over-bikie-lawyer/story-e6frg996-1226260010810>))

Ms Carter, the 27-year-old former model, international dance competitor and award-winning law student... [F]urther damaging Ms Carter's quest to be recognised for her legal brains, a gallery of risque modelling photographs of the lawyer was emailed to The Advertiser late yesterday... She has modelled since the age of 15, represented Australia in an international dance competition in Singapore in 1999 and 2000 and was a Clipsal Grid Girl in 2003... ([The Advertiser](http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/striking-backstory-of-vince-focarellis-lawyer-stacey-carter/story-e6frea6u-1226262309003) (<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/striking-backstory-of-vince-focarellis-lawyer-stacey-carter/story-e6frea6u-1226262309003>))

While The Advertiser story did go on to detail Ms Carter's considerable academic achievements and The Australian noted her career highlights, the question remains as to the newsworthiness of Ms Carter's appearance and her modelling career. Instead of the focus on the unfortunate death of Mr Focarelli's son, and his wounding, the lawyer became the story. And the story is implicitly focused on sex appeal through the [Zara Garde-Wilson](http://www.crikey.com.au/2008/06/11/let-zarah-garde-wilson-practise-law-again/) (<http://www.crikey.com.au/2008/06/11/let-zarah-garde-wilson-practise-law-again/>) and the *Underbelly* comparison.

Is this the sort of case described by Bettina Arndt, of 'advertising her wares to the world not just her target audience and somehow men are expected to know when they are not on her page'?

Obviously, it is not.

The focus on Ms Carter's appearance, while she was [dressed in a top](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/media-revved-up-over-bikie-lawyer/story-e6frg996-1226260010810) (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/media-revved-up-over-bikie-lawyer/story-e6frg996-1226260010810>) that revealed no cleavage and that was covered by a standard-issue lawyer-y black jacket, illustrates the complexity of women's clothing, attractiveness and sex appeal and how men (or the media) might respond to it.



(<http://amicaecuriae.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/815033-120202-stacey-carter.jpg>)

Photo of Stacey Carter in The Australian 2/2/12

There is plenty of advice out there for women in business (including the law (<http://amicaecuriae.com/2011/04/20/corporate-dressing/>)) on what to wear. Wear skirts (<http://jobs.aol.com/articles/2011/09/21/why-working-women-should-wear-skirts-instead-of-pants/>) (there's always been 'social pressure to look sexually desirable' apparently); wear makeup (<http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2011/08/19/comfort-vs-fashion-what-should-women-wear-to-work>) (but not too much); never dress like a 'sleazy girl' (<http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2010/04/12/so-what-exactly-should-female-attorneys-wear/>); look nice, not frumpy (<http://looklikealawyer.wordpress.com/>);... and so it goes.

Whether this advice is pertinent or not will depend on so many things. Context is everything and clothing choices are part of our means of communication. Like other means of communication though, such choices can sometimes be misinterpreted or even ignored. No matter how 'professional' a woman seeks to appear, sometimes that just isn't enough.

As for Bettina Arndt's thesis? Well based on the to-do surrounding Ms Carter, I suspect that titillation is in the eye of the beholder and it's not necessarily connected solely to the display of ones breasts.

Guest blogger Kate Galloway (http://www.jcu.edu.au/law/staff/JCUCDEV_002672.html) teaches law at James Cook University. You can follow her blog at Curl (<http://katgallow.blogspot.com/>), and on twitter at @KatGallow (<https://twitter.com/%21/katgallow>).

Is titillation all in the eye of the beholder? What do you think?

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